Healthy Eating and Staying Active As We Age

Pilot Initial Efficacy of an Older Adult Curriculum

Camille B. McGuire, MS; Anne-Carter Carrington, MS; Johanna Hahn, MA; Lauren Kennedy, PhD; Samantha Harden, PhD; Keely O’Keefe, MS; Elena Serrano, PhD; Sarah Misyak, PhD

Virginia Tech Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise; Tennessee State University Department of Human Sciences

Background

THE PROBLEM
Older adults are at a greater risk for malnutrition and chronic diseases than younger adults. Improvements in nutrient intake and physical activity levels can help alleviate, manage, and prevent many of these risks. By 2034, older adults are projected to outnumber children for the first time in United States history. Due to this shift in demographics, nutrition education and health-related resources specific to older adults has become increasingly critical.

No viable curricula were identified to be used with SNAP-Ed for older audiences that specifically addressed low-income challenges, such as food resource management and food security. Furthermore, there were no older adult curricula that utilized learner-center approaches to education, and offered visuals appropriate for older adults.

OUR SOLUTION
The need for an evidence-based nutrition education program that targets these specific needs of the aging population was identified by Virginia's Family Nutrition Program. The Family Nutrition Program developed the Healthy Eating and Staying Active as We Age (HESA) curriculum in FY 2018 and piloted in the program in FY 2019.

Objective

To assess behavior changes in nutrition, physical activity, food safety and food resource management practices of SNAP-Ed eligible older adults as a result of participation in Healthy Eating and Staying Active as We Age (HESA).

Study Design and Methods

SETTING AND TARGET AUDIENCE
Community settings across Virginia. Target audience included Virginia SNAP eligible adults (n=278) ages 45 years and older.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION
The HESA curriculum is comprised of nine, 60-minute lessons consisting of nutrition education, food tasting experiences, physical activity engagement, and hands-on activities. Lessons were implemented by SNAP-Ed Program Assistants (para-professional, peer educators).

Sample Materials – Flipcharts and Worksheets

HESA DATA VS. ESBA (CONTROL)
Behavior changes from HESA participants were compared to behavior changes from Eating Smart, Being Active, the evidence-based curriculum used statewide by all adult Program Assistants for SNAP-Ed (and EFNEP). There were no significant differences in behaviors or perceptions of interest except in perceived opportunities for physical activity. The increase in perceived opportunities for physical activity was significantly greater among HESA participants than ESBA participants.

EVALUATION METHODS
Paired t-tests were used to analyze pre- and post-intervention surveys rated on a Likert type scale. Participants' food resource management, nutrition and physical activity, food safety behaviors, and perceptions of food accessibility and affordability were evaluated.

Results

HESA Participant Self-Reported Behavior and Perception Data from Pre to Post SNAP-Ed (n=278)

*PA = Physical Activity. Participants completed a pre/post questionnaire with responses rated on a Likert type scale that ranged from No or Never (1) to Almost Always (5). HESA participants reported statistically significant improvements in all areas except perceived access to spaces to be physically active.

Conclusions

SNAP-Ed implementing agencies such as Virginia’s FNP are required to use evidence-based curricula. This was the initial step in the process of creating an evidence-based curriculum to address the needs of older adults. Comparison to ESBA revealed similar efficacy, which is a promising step in becoming evidence-based.

References